

Optimization of source-sink dynamics in plant growth for ideotype breeding: a case study on maize

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Rui Qi, Yuntao Ma, Baogang Hu, Phillipe de Reffye, Paul-Henry Cournède. Optimization of sourcesink dynamics in plant growth for ideotype breeding: a case study on maize. Computers and Electronics in Agriculture, 2010, 71 (1), pp.96-105. 10.1016/j.compag.2009.12.008 . hal-00493526v2

HAL Id: hal-00493526 https://hal.science/hal-00493526v2

Submitted on 22 Jun 2010 (v2), last revised 29 Jun 2010 (v3)

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Elsevier Editorial System(tm) for Computers and Electronics in Agriculture Manuscript Draft

Manuscript Number:

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Article Type: Original Research Paper

Keywords: Pareto front; GreenLab; functional-structural model; Zea mays.; multi-objective optimization

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Abstract: The objective of this work is to illustrate how a mathematical model of plant growth could be possible to design ideotypes and thus leads to new breeding strategies with optimization guidance. As a test case, maize (Zea mays L., DEA cultivar), which is one of the most widely cultivated cereals all over the world, is selected for this study. The experimental data reported in a previous study are used to estimate parameters of a plant growth model. As the cob and the compartment of leaves and stem can be benefited from economically, an optimization problem with single objective maximization of cob weight and a multi-objective optimization problem are formulated, respectively. The Particle Swarm Optimization approach is applied to solve these two optimization problems based on the existing plant growth model, namely, "GreenLab". The optimized variables are specific parameters of GreenLab model related to plant genetics, specially the parameters of the cob sink variation function. The cob position on the stem is an additional factor in the investigation. Plant growth behavior is analyzed based on the plant growth model through optimizations. The optimization results revealed the source-sink dynamics. In comparison

with the experimental data reported in a previous study, the numerical results showed significant yield increasing from both optimization problems. The work described in this paper confirmed that optimization approaches will be a promising tool for genetic analysis and management control to improve breeding strategies and to design an ideotype of high-yield maize, especially in the current agricultural context and the increasing importance of co-products when designing cultivation practices.

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Abstract

The objective of this work is to illustrate how a mathematical model of plant growth could be possible to design ideotypes and thus leads to new breeding strategies with optimization guidance. As a test case, maize (Zea mays L., DEA cultivar), which is one of the most widely cultivated cereals all over the world, is selected for this study. The experimental data reported in a previous study are used to estimate parameters of a plant growth model. As the cob and the compartment of leaves and stem can be benefited from economically, an optimization problem with single objective maximization of cob weight and a multi-objective optimization problem are formulated, respectively. The Particle Swarm Optimization approach is applied to solve these two optimization problems based on the existing plant growth model, namely, "GreenLab". The optimized variables are specific parameters of GreenLab model related to plant genetics, specially the parameters of the cob sink variation function. The cob position on the stem is an additional factor in the investigation. Plant growth behavior is analyzed based on the plant growth model through optimizations. The optimization results revealed the source-sink dynamics. In comparison with the experimental data reported in a previous study, the numerical results showed significant yield increasing from both optimization problems. The work described in this paper confirmed that optimization approaches will be a promising tool for genetic analysis and management control to improve breeding strategies and to design an ideotype of high-yield maize, especially in the current agricultural context and the increasing importance of co-products when designing

1 cultivation practices.

2 Key words: *Pareto front*, GreenLab, functional-structural model, *Zea mays.*,
3 multi-objective optimization

4 Introduction

In plant breeding, the concept of ideotype is first defined in (Donald, 1968): "a plant model which is expected to yield a greater quantity or quality of ... useful product when developed as a cultivar", "plants with model characteristics known to influence photosynthesis, growth, and (in cereals) grain yield". Since then, the design of ideotype has been a major issue in genetic selection in order to optimize crop yields. There are two main strategies to investigate ideotype breeding: experiment based and plant model based approaches. Peng et al. (2008) presented the research results of almost 20 years on the ideotype design of rice with the objective of high potential yield, using an experiment based approach. However, the performance of the improved plant type, which is obtained after the first five year experiments, is worse and disappointing. The critical drawback of experiment based approach is that the time consuming for experiments is long (10 years needed by Dencic (1994) and by Lauri and Costes (2004)) and it consumes resources that are limited (field, water, labor) due to the cultivation of thousands of plants (Dencic, 1994). Nowadays, it becomes widely accepted that plant growth models may provide efficient tools to study plant growth behavior (Tardieu, 2003; Letort et al., 2008a), since they can not only complement field experiments, but also save time and resources. Therefore, researchers dedicated themselves to study ideotype breeding based on plant models

1	(Yin et al., 2003; Cilas et al., 2006). As plant architectural information is more
2	intuitionistic and is easier to measure, Cilas et al. (2006) used an architectural plant
3	growth model to study the ideotype of Coffea canephora for good yield capacity. Like
4	as, in Peng et al. (2008), the architecture traits of the ideotype plant were highlighted.
5	Yin et al. (2003) pointed out that the physiological information of plant growth can
6	also be used to improve the ideotype breeding efficiency; hence, he used a process
7	based plant growth model for ideotype breeding. However, note that even though
8	Cilas et al. (2006) and Peng et al. (2008) investigated ideotype breeding from the
9	architectural point of view, and Yin et al. (2003) from the physiological point of view,
10	they all agree that there exist critical relationships between plant architectures and
11	physiological processes during plant growth, with other researchers like Rasmusson
12	(1987), Sievänen et al. (2000), Luquet et al. (2006), and Fourcaud et al. (2008). The
13	design of ideotypes should thus take into account both architectural and physiological
14	aspects. In parallel, functional-structural plant growth models were developed
15	(Perttunen et al., 1998; Kurth, 2000; Allen et al., 2005; Cournède et al., 2008),
16	combining the description of organogenesis, photosynthesis and biomass partitioning.
17	They can serve as the basis to improve plant breeding.

Maize (*Zea mays* L., DEA cultivar) is chosen for ideotype breeding in the present work, as it is one of the most widely cultivated cereals all over the world. Commonly, it is used in the human diet in both fresh and processed forms; the grain and vegetative parts of maize are fed to livestock, and the components of the grain may be refined for direct consumption (Pratt, 2001). Moreover, the fruit compartment and the

vegetative compartment can be used as biofuel of the first and second generations, respectively, which becomes of important economical interest (Baenziger *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, the objective of this work is to breed maize first with the potential best cob yield, and second with high yields of both cob and vegetative compartments. To find the appropriate ideotype of maize that satisfies the requirement of high yield capacity, optimization problems with respect to plant physiological processes are formulated and numerical optimization methods are applied to a functional-structural plant growth model.

There have been a lot of works about optimization on crops based on plant growth models in the past decades. Most of the corresponding works are related to optimization of environmental components including water (Ho et al., 2004), soil (Mustafa, 1989) or temperature (Fink, 1993); others related to optimization of cultivation modes, such as fertilizer (van Evert et al., 2006), seeding strategy (Prasanna Kumar et al., 2008) or water supply strategy (Wu et al., 2005). Moreover, several works focused on optimizing climate conditions especially in greenhouse (Linker et al., 1998; Dieleman et al., 2006; van Henten et al., 2006). Morimoto et al. (1993) also did optimal control of water supply (Morimoto et al., 1995), humidity (Morimoto et al., 1997) and temperature control (Morimoto et al., 2003) on plant growth. But the plant growth model he used is a kind of "black-box", which is trained and formed by neural networks, without using physiological mechanisms of plant growth. The corresponding review about optimization on environmental factors can be found in (van Straten et al., 2000; King and Sigrimis, 2001; Ferentinos et al., 2006).

Technically and generally speaking, all of these optimization works belong to optimal control. Even though Haverkort and Grashoff (2004) and Herndl *et al.* (2007) used plant models to find the ideotype of plants with the optimum product with respect to physiological parameters, the results they found were through trial and error method based on simulation. None of them did optimization on the parameters that describe the inner physiological processes of plant growth, the factors related to genetic parameters or new genotype investigations for a specific species.

For this study on ideotype breeding, GreenLab plant growth model is chosen for the following reasons. First of all, GreenLab is a functional-structural plant growth model, which can describe the interaction between plant architecture and plant physiological processes (Mathieu et al., 2008) that is necessary for ideotype breeding. Second, Preliminary studies have allowed modelling the growth of maize cultivars with the GreenLab model. Model parameters had already been estimated from experimental data over different years (Guo et al., 2006; Ma et al., 2007) and over different density conditions (Ma et al., 2008). The relative stability of model parameters in a wide range of environmental conditions leads us to consider a probable link of the model parameters to the genotype of the species. Letort et al. (2008a) explored the possibility to link GreenLab to a genetic model in order to design new breeding strategies. Third, Carson et al. (2006) pointed out that plant growth is a complex system, which raised a challenge on plant growth models for parameter estimation and model validation. This challenge must be overcome for model application. Over decade of GreenLab model development, besides maize, its

parameters have been well estimated on tomato (Dong *et al.*, 2008), chrysanthemum (Kang *et al.*, 2006), wheat (Kang *et al.*, 2008), cucumber (Mathieu *et al.*, 2007), Chinese pine tree (Guo *et al.*, 2006), Arabidopsis (Letort *et al.*, 2006), and beech tree (Letort *et al.*, 2008b). GreenLab model was shown to be an efficient tool to describe source-sink dynamics in plant growth. Fourth, GreenLab model can be considered as a dynamic system, whose mathematical formulation makes it suitable for solving optimization problems.

As mentioned above, from an economical point of view, there are potential benefits from both cob weight and the total weight of leaves and stem (to feed animals as forage, or biofuel). Firstly, an optimization problem with single objective maximization of cob weight is formulated and investigated, as the most beneficial component in maize is cob. And then, a multi-objective optimization problem with two conflict objectives: maximization of cob weight and of the total weight of vegetative compartment at the same time, is formulated with a constraint of a minimal tassel weight. The optimization is based on the GreenLab plant growth model, which is used to simulate the growth behavior of maize and to estimate parameters from measured data which are the preconditions of applying optimization. It is acknowledged that cob weight is highly dependent on growth conditions during the early stages of grain filling and the final cob weight reflects the source-sink ratio of the entire grain filling period (Borrás et al., 2002); final cob weight of maize depends on the relationship between cob sink and availability of assimilates resulting from the biomass production of the plant to fill this sink (Borrás et al., 2003). Therefore, the

optimized variables of both problems are specific GreenLab parameters related to plant genetics: parameters of cob sink variation function. In addition, the impact of cob position on the cob weight and on the total weight of vegetative compartment is investigated. A heuristic optimization algorithm, Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO) was used to solve the problems.

- 7 Materials and method

8 Description of the GreenLab model

9 GreenLab is a functional-structural plant growth model combining the 10 descriptions of plant architecture and physiological processes of plant growth, in 11 interaction with the environment (light, water, temperature and density). The dynamic 12 mechanisms to generate plant architecture (organogenesis), plant biomass production 13 and partitioning to the organs are introduced in details in (de Reffye and Hu, 2003; 14 Yan *et al.*, 2004; Cournède *et al.*, 2008). Here, only the necessary points to understand 15 our approach are recalled.

In the usual cultivation conditions, maize is a single stem crop. The phytomer appearance is controlled by the thermal time in GreenLab model for maize. The model time step, also called growth cycle (GC), is thus equivalent to the thermal time necessary for a new phytomer to appear. The topology of maize cultivar ND108 is simplified as follows: first six phytomers with short internodes appear; they are followed by 15 phytomers with longer internodes; the last one bears the male flower (tassel). Therefore, the organogenesis terminates at the end of the 21st growth cycle,

but the plant is still alive until the 33rd growth cycle. Even though several phytomers
may bear female flowers (cobs), Guo *et al.* (2006) chose to gather all the potential cob
weights on the 15th phytomer. This simplification was proved very effective for plant
modelling and model calibration (Guo *et al.*, 2006).

The functional processes of plant growth are described by a source-sink model in GreenLab, with a common pool of biomass. GreenLab simulates plant growth from the seed stage, hence the initial plant biomass is from seed and the initial organs are driven by seed. And then, at the following growth cycle n, biomass production Q_n of an individual plant is described in Eqn.(1). It depends on the total green leaf surface area at the end of the previous growth cycle n-1 (S_{n-1}), on environmental factors gathered in the function E_n and on empirical parameters β (linked to energetic efficiency) and γ (linked to light interception):

$$Q_n = \beta E_n (1 - \exp(-\gamma S_{n-1}))$$

$$Q_0 = Q_{seed}$$
(1)

14 where Q_{seed} is seed biomass.

All living organs (blades, sheaths, internodes, cob and tassel) are sinks among which biomass is distributed according to their sink values. The total demand of the plant at growth cycle n, denoted by D_n , is given by:

18
$$D_n = \sum_o \sum_{j=1}^{\min(n, t_x_o)} N_{n-j+1}^o p_o(j)$$
 (2)

where p_o(j) is the sink of organ o with age j; o represents blade (a), sheath (s),
internode (e), female (f) and male (m) organs; t_{x_o} is the expansion duration of organ o;
N^o_n is the number of organ o generated at growth cycle n.

The biomass increment of an organ *o* with age *j* at growth cycle *n* is proportional to its sink value $p_o(j)$ and the ratio of biomass production to the total demand of the plant, as detailed in Eqn.(3).

$$\Delta q_o(n,j) = p_o(j) \frac{Q_n}{D_n}$$
(3)

The accumulated biomass for an organ *o* with age *j* at growth cycle *n* is given by:

$$q_{o}(n,j) = \sum_{k=1}^{j} \Delta q_{o}(n-j+k,k)$$
(4)

As a consequence, the total green leaf surface area at growth cycle n, denoted by S_n , is

$$S_{n} = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{i_{a}} N_{n-j+1}^{a} \cdot q_{a}(n,j)}{slw}$$
(5)

10 where t_a is the blade functioning duration, and *slw* is the specific leaf weight.

11 The family of Beta functions was chosen to describe the sink variation during the 12 expansion, as in Eqn.(6).

 $f_{o}(j) = \begin{cases} be_{o}(j) / M_{o} & (1 \le j \le t_{x_{-}o}) \\ 0 & (j > t_{x_{-}o}) \end{cases}$ with $be_{o}(j) = (j - 0.5)^{a_{o} - 1} \cdot (t_{x_{-}o} - j + 0.5)^{b_{o} - 1}$ (6) and $M_{o} = \max\{be_{o}(j) | 1 \le j \le t_{o}\}$

15 and
$$M_o = \max_j \left(be_o(j), 1 \le j \le t_{x_o} \right)$$

16 where a_o and b_o are the coefficients of the sink variation function.

The sink value of an organ with age j, denoted by $p_o(j)$, is $f_o(j)$ multiplied by the sink amplitude (also called sink strength) P_o as in Eqn.(7). Diverse sink variations can be obtained by setting different values of the coefficients: a_o and b_o in Eqn.(6). An example is given in Figure 1.

$$p_o(j) = P_o f_o(j) \tag{7}$$

Field experiment and field measurements on maize

Maize cultivar ND108 (Zea mays L., DEA cultivar) seed was sown 0.6 m apart in north-south-oriented rows that were 0.6 m apart, at the China Agricultural University (CAU) (39°50'N, 116°25'E). The resulting plant population (28 000 plants ha⁻¹) is about half that commonly used by local farmers and was chosen to minimize competition among plants. Plants emerged on the 18th May 2000. Soil, irrigation and fertilizer inputs were managed so as to avoid any mineral and water limitation to plant growth, and plant disease, pest or stress symptoms. Samples were taken destructively on 12 dates. Fresh weights of blades, sheaths, internodes, cob and tassel were measured and recorded individually at each sample date. The number of organs generated at each growth cycle, the functioning duration of blades and the expansion duration of organs, specific leaf weight, can be observed and measured by field experiments. The detailed information about the environmental conditions, sampling strategy and the measured data is given by (Guo et al., 2006).

Parameter estimation of GreenLab

In GreenLab, the parameters are classified into two categories: measurable parameters, i.e. functioning duration of blades, number of organs emerged at each growth cycle, and hidden parameters which cannot be measured directly in the field, i.e. organ sink. To guarantee that GreenLab can describe the dynamic processes of plant growth well, it is necessary to estimate the hidden parameters through minimizing the difference between the measured data and the corresponding simulation results of GreenLab.

The same set of parameters is estimated simultaneously by fitting with several plants of a species at different development stages, which is called multi-fitting. In this paper, the data measured at three stages (8th GC corresponding to vegetative stage, 18th GC approximately corresponding to flowering stage and 33rd GC corresponding to physiological maturity) are used as target data.

8 Mi

Multi-objective Optimization

9 In multi-objective optimization problems, several objectives are optimized 10 (maximization or minimization) simultaneously. The mathematical formulism of a 11 multi-objective optimization problem is given by:

12

$$Maximize (J_1, J_2, \dots, J_m)$$

$$s.t. \ g_i(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) \le 0, \quad i = 1, 2, \dots, k$$

$$h_j(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) = 0, \quad j = 1, 2, \dots, l$$
(8)

where x_i is the *i*th element of the vector X on which we optimize and n is the dimension of the problem; J_i is the *i*th objective which is a function of X and m is the number of objectives; g_i is the *i*th inequality constraint of the problem and k is the number of inequality constraints; h_j is the *j*th equality constraint and l is the number of equalities.

For multi-objective optimization problems, generally, objectives are in conflict with each other. In comparison with single objective optimization problems for which we may have results on the existence and unicity of the solution, the situation of multi-objective problems is more complex, since there is no canonical relationship in the feasible space. Thus, the optimal solutions for multi-objective optimization problems is defined such that for these solutions, performance on one objective cannot be improved without sacrificing performance on at least another. The solutions satisfying this property form the *Pareto front* (Mostaghim and Teich, 2003).

5 For maize, one of our objectives is to maximize cob weight, which is used for 6 food or biofuel of the first generation. The formula for calculating the final weight of 7 cob when plant age is *n* is as follows:

$$J_{1} = \sum_{k=1}^{t_{x_{-f}}} p_{f}(k) \frac{Q_{n-(t_{x_{-f}}-k)}}{D_{n-(t_{x_{-f}}-k)}}$$
(9)

9 However, for the cultivar of maize ND108 (*Zea mays* L., DEA cultivar) that we 10 considered, leaves and stems are useful for poultry as a kind of forage. Moreover, 11 leaves and stem of maize will be also used for biofuel of the second generation, 12 whereas cob should be reserved for food. Thus, it is also of economical interest to 13 maximize the total weight of leaves and stem. The equation for calculating the final 14 weight of leaves and stem is given by:

15
$$J_{2} = \sum_{j=1}^{n} N_{n-j+1}^{a} \sum_{k=1}^{\min(j,t_{x_{-}a})} p_{a}(k) \frac{Q_{n-j+k}}{D_{n-j+k}} + \sum_{j=1}^{n} N_{n-j+1}^{i} \sum_{k=1}^{\min(j,t_{x_{-}i})} p_{i}(j) \frac{Q_{n-j+k}}{D_{n-j+k}}$$
(10)

In Eqn.(10), the first item corresponds to the total weight of leaves, and the second item to the stem weight.

A constraint on the tassel weight is also imposed, since cob weight and tassel weight are interrelated. Cob weight is controlled by pollen production, while the pollen production depends on the tassel size of maize. Uribelarrea *et al.* (2002) showed that if the tassel size is reduced, the cob size will be limited. Thus, a constraint that the tassel weight should be beyond a threshold is set. The formula for
 calculating the final weight of tassel when plant age is *n* is as follows:

$$g = \sum_{k=1}^{t_{x}} p_m(k) \frac{Q_{n-(t_{x}-m-k)}}{D_{n-(t_{x}-m-k)}}$$
(11)

Finally, the multi-objective optimization for maize is given by:

$$\begin{aligned} &Maximize \ (J_1, J_2) \\ &s.t. \ g \ge threshold \end{aligned} \tag{12}$$

For potential applications in breeding, the parameters we optimize should be linked to plant genetics and therefore should be representative of some physiological processes. As it is acknowledged that final cob weight of maize depends on the relationship between cob sink and biomass production (Borrás et al., 2002), we choose to study the cob sink variation. Thus, the parameters we optimize are the cob sink strength P_f and the two coefficients of the Beta function a_f and b_f . The effect of cob position on the cob weight and on the total weight of leaves and stem is also studied.

15 Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO)

The optimization problem revealed non convex and multimodal, particularly since there is no unique solution for multi-objective problems. Therefore, population-based heuristic optimization algorithms, which usually allow obtaining quickly a number of acceptable solutions, were used in our study. Compared to the other population-based heuristic optimization algorithms, PSO has a high convergence rate for a wide range of optimization problems (Kennedy and Eberhart, 2001). Hence, it was chosen to solve our problems.

PSO is proposed by Kennedy and Eberhart (1995), which originally simulates the behaviour of bird flocking. It is also an iterative algorithm, similar to other population-based optimization algorithms. The feasible solutions found at the current iteration are recorded separately in each individual in the population as their current positions. The direction and the distance controlling how the individuals move are determined by their velocities and their experiences during the searching. With the help of social and cognition knowledge of each individual (also called particle), the population (also called swarm) converges to the optimal solution (or position). With the increasing development of PSO in the past decade, there are many variants of PSO in order to improve its performance (convergence rate, convergence accuracy, etc). In this paper, PSO with passive congregation (He et al., 2004) is used to solve the single objective optimization problem, thanks to its generalization capacities and robust performance. The equations used to calculate velocities and the new positions are given by:

 $v_{ij}^{k+1} = \omega^{k} v_{ij}^{k} + c_{1} r_{1} (B_{ij} - x_{ij}^{k}) + c_{2} r_{2} (B_{gj} - x_{ij}^{k}) + c_{3} r_{3} (B_{rj} - x_{ij}^{k})$ $x_{ij}^{k+1} = x_{ij}^{k} + v_{ij}^{k+1}$ (13)

17 where v_{ij}^{k} is the *j*th coordinate of the velocity of the *i*th particle at iteration *k*; B_{ij} is the 18 *j*th coordinate of the best position recorded by the *i*th particle during the previous 19 iterations; B_{gj} is the *j*th coordinate of the position of the global best particle among all 20 the particles in the swarm, which is marked by *g*; B_{rj} is the *j*th coordinate of the best 21 position recorded by a random selected particle *r* during the previous iterations; x_{ij}^{k} is 22 the *j*th coordinate of the current position of particle *i* at iteration *k*; w^{k} is inertia weight

value at iteration k, which decreases linearly from the maximal inertia weight to the minimal one; c_1 and c_2 are acceleration coefficients; r_1 and r_2 are uniformly distributed random values between 0 and 1. The second and the third items of Eqn. (13) on the right hand side are considered as cognition knowledge and social knowledge of a particle respectively, and the last item is used to avoid getting trapped into the local optimum.

Many researchers have already applied PSO to solve multi-objective optimization problems (Fieldsend, 2004). The specific algorithm that we used is the mixture of the algorithms proposed by Mostaghim and Teich (2003) and by Tripathi et al. (2007). To extend the original PSO to solve multi-objective problem and to find the Pareto front, the equations for changing the velocity and position of each particle are improved slightly, as given by Eqn.(14).

$$v_{ij}^{k+1} = \omega^{k} v_{ij}^{k} + c_{1}^{k} r_{1} \left(B_{ij} - x_{ij}^{k} \right) + c_{2}^{k} r_{2} \left(B l_{ij} - x_{ij}^{k} \right)$$

$$x_{ij}^{k+1} = x_{ij}^{k} + v_{ij}^{k+1}$$
(14)

To make the balance between exploration and exploitation, the acceleration coefficient $c_1^{\ k}$ decreases linearly, and the acceleration coefficient $c_2^{\ k}$ increases linearly. For the problems with constraints, there are two criteria to decide whether the *j*th coordinate of the best position of each particle B_{ij} is updated by the *j*th coordinate of the new position x_{ij}^{k+1} : if x_i^{k+1} satisfies the constraints while B_i does not, or if one of the objective function value with respect to x_i^{k+1} is better than the one with respect to B_i , no matter whether the constraints are satisfied, replace B_{ij} with x_{ij}^{k+1} .

The aim of multi-objective optimization problems is to find all the optimal solutions that form the Pareto front. Therefore, to obtain various solutions at a given

1 iteration, the algorithm is changed by replacing the unique global best position with a 2 local guide best position for each particle, denoted by Bl_{ij} for the *j*th coordinate of 3 particle *i* in Eqn.(14).

All the optimal solutions are recorded in an archive with limited size. The Sigma method (Mostaghim and Teich, 2003) is used to determine the local guide best position of each particle. The solution in the archive which has the nearest distance from a given particle is decided to its local guide best position. For more details, we refer to (Mostaghim and Teich, 2003). When the maximal number of solutions in the archive is reached, the solutions which have the shortest distance from the other solutions in the archive will be deleted. If the number of solutions in the archive is less than its maximal number, new optimal solutions will be added into the archive.

Results

14 Multi-fitting results

The hidden parameters estimated by a generalized non-linear least square method are different from the ones in Guo *et al.* (2006) and Ma *et al.* (2007), as the sink variation function (Beta function) in this work is slightly improved as shown in Eqn.(6). The comparison of the simulation results by GreenLab with the estimated parameters and the measured data is given in Figure 2. The optimization results in the following sections are based on the maize modelled by GreenLab with the estimated parameter values listed in Table 1.

22 Single optimization problem of maximization of cob weight

Fixing cob expansion duration, on one hand, it limits the potential duration of obtaining biomass for cob. On the other hand, cob potential ability to obtain biomass will be missed. To avoid these two drawbacks, in this subsection, we suppose that cob expansion duration depends on its position on the stem, to ensure that the cob has possibility to obtain biomass until the end of the plant growth. For example, if the cob appears at the 19th growth cycle, its expansion duration is 15 growth cycles with plant age 33 growth cycles.

The maximal cob weights associated to different cob positions are not significantly different, as shown in Figure 3(a). The corresponding optimal cob sink strength variations are similar as shown in Figure 3(b) marked only with symbols, and the estimated one is represented by the curve in "---". Wherever the cob is and whatever its expansion duration is, we found that the optimal cob development strategies are similar. The optimal cob sink is almost zero at the beginning of cob development, in order to reduce the competition for biomass with source organs and to let leaf surface area increase, and then the sink increases monotonously till the end of plant growth.

Comparing the estimated and optimal cob sink variations with cob particularly born by the 1st phytomer counted from the bottom shown in Figure 3(b), we can separate the cob development process into 4 stages. During the first stage from the 1st growth cycle to 15th growth cycle, the optimal cob sink is a little larger than the estimated one, but can be neglected. It has no negative effect on the source organ development. In this period, the leaf surface areas for the estimated plant and the

optimal plant are the same. Consequently, there is no difference among the optimal cob weights when the cob is born by the 1st phytomer to by the 15th phytomer; meanwhile, it leads to a slight difference among the optimal cob weights when the cob position is higher than the 15th phytomer, as shown in Figure 3(a). The second stage is from the 16th growth cycle to the 23rd growth cycle. Even though the optimal cob sink is still a little larger than the estimated one, it does affect the source organ development. The cob competes for biomass against the source organ and the other organs. This competition leads to the decrease of the leaf surface area as shown in Figure 4. During the third stage from the 23^{rd} growth cycle to the 31^{st} growth cycle, the optimal cob sink value keeps increasing, but smoothly. On the contrary, for the observed plant, the cob sink increases significantly, biomass allocation to the cob is done with detriment to leaves. Hence, the leaf surface area begins to decrease. During the last stage of plant growth within two growth cycles, the optimal cob sink begins to increase significantly and quickly. Since the other organ sinks are negligible, all the biomass is allocated to the cob as shown in Figure 5: the ratio in this period tends to infinity.

The comparison results of the cob sink variation reveal the source-sink dynamics. The increment of the cob weight is the product of the cob sink value and the ratio of the plant biomass production, which depends on the leaf surface area, to the plant demand that is the sum of all the organ sinks, as described in Eqn.(3). Even though the cob sink value is smaller than the estimated one, the leaf surface area is higher. Due to the optimal trade-offs between sources and sinks, the cob weight with the optimal parameter values (1032 g) is bigger than the observed one (895 g).

Multi-objective optimization problem

Economically speaking, we can benefit both from cob as food for human beings and as biofuel of the first generation, and from leaves and stem as forage for poultry and probably as biofuel of the second generation. Therefore, an optimization problem with two objective functions on maximization of cob weight and total weight of leaves and stem simultaneously is investigated. The optimal result of this multi-objective optimization problem, known as *Pareto front*, is shown in Figure 6, for each cob position. There is no obvious difference among the Pareto fronts associated to each cob position. They are all very similar and can not be distinguished, as shown in Figure 6. Each Pareto front is given by about 500 optimal solutions of cob sink variation. Hence in Figure 7, we outlined the area covered by all the optimal solutions of cob sink variation. Particularly, two examples of the optimal cob sink variation are given, when the cob is born by the 12th phytomer with cob weight of 792 g and total weight of leaves and stem of 1695 g, and when the cob is born by the 15th phytomer with cob weight of 503 g and total weight of leaves and stem of 2050 g, respectively.

The *Pareto front* of our multi-objective optimization problem reveals source-sink dynamics and the necessary balance between both objectives. Maximization of the total weight of leaves and stem leads to a zero cob sink strength. On the other hand, to maximize the cob weight, the cob sink value can not be maximal all the way, otherwise there would not be enough leaf surface area, and the reduced biomass

production would decrease the final cob weight. For this reason, the left extremity of the Pareto front corresponds to a zero cob weight whereas the right extremity corresponds to a strictly positive weight of stem and leaves. For maize cultivar ND108 (Zea mays L., DEA cultivar), the tassel appears and begins to develop at the 21st growth cycle, with a very quick expansion (2 growth cycles). From the optimal results shown in Figure 7, we found that the tassel expansion corresponds to the early stages when the cob sink begins to increase.

In Figure 8, the evolution of the tassel weight corresponding to the points on the Pareto front is illustrated. We see that for a wide range, the tassel weight does not vary since its expansion corresponds to growth cycles when the cob sink is still very low. However, we found that for the maximal cob weights (above 900g), the tassel weight is decreasing. It corresponds to experimental observations of Westgate et al. (2003) who indicated that there is a potential gain of cob yield by decreasing the tassel weight.

The cob weight simulated by GreenLab with the estimated parameter values is 1013 g, whereas the total weight of leaves and stem is 927 g and the tassel weight is 29 g. With the optimal parameter values, the maximal cob weight among the Pareto *front* in Figure 6 is 1032 g, the corresponding total weight of leaves and stem is 955 g and the tassel weight is 30 g. Comparing the Harvest Index (HI) of the simulated and the optimal plants, HI of the optimal one is surprisingly a little smaller than the simulated one, even though both the cob weight and the total weight of leaves and stem are higher than the simulated one. It revealed the trade-offs between sources and

sinks. Post-expansion and fast growing rate as shown in Figure 3(b) and Figure 7 will not only enhance the cob weight but also the weight of leaves and stem.

Discussion

In this paper, we have illustrated how the optimization of the parameters of plant growth models could be used to design ideotypes for genetic selection. The GreenLab model was chosen for the simplicity of its parameterization. Moreover, it describes plant growth, both from ecophysiological and architectural points of view, at the individual organ scale, which potentially allows distinguishing more easily genetic and environmental effects. However, we should note that the model can be extrapolated to stand level by taking into account competition between individuals (Cournède et al., 2008).

Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO), which is a population-based heuristic optimization algorithm, is used to solve the single and multi-objective optimization problems. As it does not require the differentiation of the objective functions, and it returns several solutions at the same time, we can benefit from it to solve non-convex, single objective or multi-objective optimization problems, with potentially non-unique solutions. Compared to other population-based heuristic optimization algorithms, such as Genetic Algorithm, the PSO has a high convergence rate and a better accuracy (Kennedy and Eberhart, 2001). Even though the optimal solutions found by the PSO cannot be proven to be global, the results are better than observations and can be used to practically guide genetic selection.

The sink variation function corresponding to the maximal cob weight reveals the optimal source-sink dynamics. In order to obtain the maximal yield of cob, the cob sink value keeps extremely small: almost zero during the early development stages, so that the leaf surface area may increase. When biomass production almost saturates, the cob begins absorbing biomass quickly, especially during the last several growth cycles where nearly all the available biomass is allocated to the cob and the cob becomes the strongest competitor for biomass against the other organs. This phenomenon can be derived from the monotonously increasing cob sink variation as illustrated in Figure 3(b) for the single objective optimization of maximization of cob weight and in Figure 7 for the optimal solutions of the multi-objective optimization problem. This optimal cob development strategy is in agreement with Weiner (1988) and Vega et al. (2000): there is a threshold size for plants to produce flowers and fruits, the plant will grow as much as it can until its biomass reaches a threshold, and then the biomass may be distributed to fruits and flowers.

The interaction between cob and tassel is also deduced from the single and multi-objective optimization problems. The optimal solutions of cob sink variation revealed that the cob growth requires pollen which is provided by tassel. To get better cob weight, cob begins to absorb biomass mainly from the 20th growth cycle, while the tassel appears and absorbs biomass at the 21st growth cycle, and stops growing one growth cycle later, i.e. at the 22nd growth cycle. Considering this strong interaction between cob and tassel (Borrás et al., 2002; Uribelarrea et al., 2002), tassel weight is integrated into our multi-objective optimization problem as a constraint. A threshold is

set for tassel weight (not less than 10 g). In contrary to optimal solutions of general optimization problems with constraints that are on the boundary of the feasible area formed by constraints, all the tassel weights are higher than this 10 g. One reason is that so far we do not know the relationship between cob and tassel quantitatively. Hence, it is difficult to set the threshold value. Another reason is that tassel sink strength variation is fixed and it does not change according to the cob sink strength variation, in this work.

From the optimal results, the ideotype of maize can be deduced. From a physiological point of view, the cob begins to absorb biomass from about the 20th growth cycle when the leaf area saturates, independently of the cob position. And then, it absorbs biomass smoothly or significantly, depending on the breeding objectives. Especially, if the objective is to have a maximal cob weight, the maize should have a bigger reproductive capacity, and the cob should grow with post-expansion and fast growth rate. From an architectural point of view, for the maize giving the maximal cob weight, the leaf size is reduced during the last vegetative and reproductive stages of growth. The harvest index is above 50%. It is coincident with the ideotype of maize proposed by Mock and Pearce (1975) by analysing research results of other people with experimental based approach. The Pareto front of the multi-objective optimization problem presents all the different optimal strategies, and the decision-maker could choose his optimal strategy according to market prices or the application purposes for example. The optimal results provide a reference to improve breeding strategies and to design a new ideotype of maize.

Even though GreenLab model can simulate plant growth in response to environmental conditions (light, temperature, water, competition), some complementary work is needed to describe simultaneously carbon balance and water balance that determine the distinction between fresh and dry biomass. In addition, the parameters that we optimized are oriented to those related to the cob sink variation function, whereas the others are fixed to be the estimated values. However, there might be some correlation between parameters. Due to the limited observation data (samples), we have not been able to assess the correlation between parameters so far. If these drawbacks are corrected correspondingly, the parameter estimation accuracy should be increased and the frame work for optimization shall be improved. If the estimated parameter values are changed, the optimal solutions may be different, as the optimization is based on the model with estimated parameters. However, the methodology that we proposed to maximize both cob weight and the vegetative compartment weight, is still valid. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the relationship between sources and sinks as illustrated in Figure 3(b) and Figure 7 does not depend on parameter values. The qualitative results are not changed.

Actually, in cobs, only kernels give the food for human beings or for livestock. The number of kernels is a critical factor that affects the final kernel weight (Borrás and Otegui, 2001). Therefore, optimizing the number of kernels per cob could be an interesting work in future. So far, we do not have the information about the proportion of the kernel weight to the cob weight, which raises the difficulty to estimate parameters of GreenLab model. However, the corresponding experimental work is in

1 process this year.

Conclusion Two kinds of optimization problems of either only maximization of cob weight or maximization of cob weight and total weight of leaves and stem simultaneously were formulated. The non-convex, multimodal or non-unique solution problems were solved by a heuristic optimization algorithm, Particle Swarm Optimization. The source-sink dynamics is investigated through optimization in this study. The optimization results provide a reference for decision-makers to improve the breeding strategies or to design ideotypes of plants, especially in the current context of biofuel development, increase in agricultural products price and necessity to consider co-products when designing cultivation practices. Acknowledgement This work is partly supported by Natural Science Foundation of China (60073007, 60703043), Chinese 863 program (2008AA10Z218), and the French embassy in China. References Allen, M., Prusinkiewicz, P., DeJong, T., 2005. Using L-systems for modeling source-sink interactions, architecture and physiology of growing trees: the

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Parame	ters	Values
P_a	(Sink strength of blade)	1 (fixed)
a_a / b_a	(Coefficients of beta function for blade)	3.59 / 5.38
P_s	(Sink strength of sheath)	0.6
a_s / b_s	(Coefficients of beta function for sheath)	3.05 / 3.69
P_e	(Sink strength of internode)	1.4
a _e / b _e	(Coefficients of beta function for internode)	3.34 / 1.65
P_f	(Sink strength of cob)	806.47
a_f/b_f	(Coefficients of beta function for cob)	8.34/ 2.60
P_m	(Sink strength of tassel)	4.23
a_m / b_m	(Coefficients of beta function for tassel)	1 / 1
K _e	(Coefficient of sink strength for short internode)	0.21
β	(Energetic efficiency)	12.36
γ	(Light interception coefficient)	1.90E-4

Figure captions

2 Figure 1. Example of sink variation function (Beta law), with sink strength $P_o=10$.

Figure 2. Simulation of biomass partition to (a) blade (b) sheath (c) internode (d) cob (e) tassel, with estimated parameter values by generalized non-linear least square method. "•" represents measured data at the 8th growth cycle corresponding to vegetative stage; "•" measured data at the 18th growth cycle corresponding to flowering stage; "•" measured data at the 33rd growth cycle corresponding to physiological maturity; "–" simulation result at the 8th growth cycle; "…" simulation result at the 18th growth cycle; "---" simulation result at the 33rd growth cycle.

Figure 3. (a) Maximal cob weight associated with cob position (b) Cob sink variations:
the curve marked only with symbol represents the corresponding optimal cob sink
variation; the curve marked by "-•-" represents the estimated cob sink variation.

Figure 4. Simulation result of leaf area index for maize with estimated parameter values marked by " $-\bullet-$ " and with the optimal one marked by " $-\circ-$ " where the cob is born by the 1st phytomer counted from the bottom.

Figure 5. Comparison the ratio of cob weight to vegetative compartment weight
during the plant growth. "-•-" represents the result with estimated parameter values
and "--o--" represents the result with the optimal parameter values.

Figure 6. *Pareto front* of the multi-objective optimization problem with respect to cobposition on the stem.

Figure 7. Area covered by all the optimal cob sink variations associated with the *Pareto front*. Two examples of the optimal cob sink variations are given. " $- \blacktriangle -$ "

represents the optimal cob sink variation for maize with cob born by the 12th
phytomer, where the cob weight is 792 g and the vegetative compartment is 1695 g;
"-□-" the optimal cob sink variation for maize with cob born by the 15th phytomer,
where the cob weight is 503 g and the vegetative compartment is 2050 g.

5 Figure 8. Tassel weight with respect to cob weight, associated with the *Pareto front*.

1	1	Appendix
2 3 4	2	Symbol list
5 6 7	3	Q biomass production of an individual plant
8 9 10	4	Q_{seed} seed biomass
11 12 13	5	<i>D</i> total demand of plant
14 15	6	<i>E</i> environmental function
16 17 18	7	<i>S</i> total green leaf surface area
19 20 21	8	β energetic efficiency
22 23 24	9	<i>y</i> light inception factor
25 26	10	N_n^o number of organ <i>o</i> born at growth cycle <i>n</i>
27 28 29	11	t_{x_o} expansion duration of organ o
30 31 32	12	ta blade functioning duration
33 34 35	13	$p_o(j)$ sink value of organ o with age j
36 37	14	P_o sink amplitude (or sink strength) of organ o
38 39 40	15	f sink variation function
41 42 43	16	be beta law function
44 45 46	17	<i>M</i> normalization factor
47 48	18	a_o coefficient of beta law function for organ o
49 50 51	19	b_o coefficient of beta law function for organ o
52 53 54	20	$\Delta q_o(n,j)$ biomass increment of organ <i>o</i> with age <i>j</i> , when plant age is <i>n</i>
55 56 57	21	$q_o(n,j)$ accumulated biomass of organ <i>o</i> with age <i>j</i> , when plant age is <i>n</i>
58 59	22	slw specific leaf weight
6U 61 62		39
63 64		57
65		

1 2	1	п	plant age
3 4 5	2	j	organ age
6 7	3	J	objective function
9 10	4	g	inequality constraint function
11 12 13	5	h	equality constraint function
14 15 16	6	x	variable of optimization problem
17 18 19	7	v	velocity
20 21 22	8	W	inertia weight
23 24	9	С	acceleration coefficient
25 26 27	10	r	uniformly distributed random value between 0 and 1
28 29 30	11	В	particle best position
31 32 33	12	Bl	particle local best position
34 35 26			
37 38			
39 40 41			
42 43			
44 45 46			
47 48			
49 50			
51 52			
53			
54 55			
56			
57 58			
59			
60 61			
62			40
63			+υ
ъ4 65			



Example of sink variation function (Beta law)

expansion time (Growth Cycle)













Optimal cob weight associated with cob position





plant age (Growth Cycle)

Leaf Area Index (LAI)



Ratio of cob weight to vegetative compartment weight









